Young Colombian refugees in front of their flat in Panama City, Panama.

This chapter provides a summary of the general environment in which UNHCR operated in the Americas in 2014. It presents the main challenges and constraints that affected the organization's operational response, and sums up the year's achievements across the region.

Details of the largest operations in the region and its subregions in 2014 are presented on the *Global Focus* website at **http://reporting.unhcr.org.**

THE

AMERICAS

| WORKING ENVIRONMENT |

- To commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees in 2014, regional meetings were held among Latin American and Caribbean States, civil society and UNHCR. The commemorations campaign known as the Cartagena +30 process culminated in a ministerial event in Brasilia in December 2014, where States adopted the landmark Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action to strengthen protection and find solutions for the region's refugees, displaced and stateless people in the decade to come.

- In 2014, there were unprecedented movements of people from the Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA) (namely El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras), many fleeing violence, persecution and transnational organized crime. More than 130,000 individuals fled to Mexico and North America in search of protection. At least 68,000 unaccompanied children were apprehended crossing the southern border of the United States. High levels of insecurity, threats and brutal violence, as well as the risk of forced recruitment into gangs (*pandillas*) were of particular concern for those working to protect these minors.

- In Colombia, the Peace Dialogue sought to resolve the 50-year conflict with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and held promise for a ceasefire and peace agreement expected before the end of 2015. UNHCR helped find solutions for internally displaced people in 17 locations across the country through the Transitional Solutions Initiative.

- Protection at sea posed a challenge for Caribbean States and Territories, which struggled to patrol their extensive maritime boundaries and provide protection safeguards for asylum-seekers and others with protection needs in mixed flows. Nevertheless, the Caribbean committed to enhancing protection standards by establishing a Regional Consultative Mechanism for solidarity and burden sharing.

- Canada, Costa Rica, Mexico, Nicaragua and the United States received an increasing number of asylum applications filed by asylum-seekers from the NTCA. Brazil received the second largest number of asylum applications, surpassed only by the United States, which received 11,400 applications last year. The number of asylum-seekers doubled to nearly 500 in the Caribbean, a subregion that struggled to provide an effective response across such a large geographical area.

- Internal displacement in Colombia remained high, with 6.1 million people registered by the Government. On a monthly basis, more than 900 Colombian nationals continued to cross borders into neighbouring Ecuador.

- Statelessness was of particular concern in the Caribbean, with hundreds of thousands in the Dominican Republic denied their nationality following a Constitutional Court ruling in 2013. In spite of Dominican authorities' efforts to restore nationality for some, an effective solution for all has not yet been found.

- UNHCR concluded partnership agreements in 2014 with regional organizations, such as the Organization of American States and the Central American Integration System. The aim was to strengthen the region's legal and institutional frameworks and promote high standards of regional refugee protection. Within MERCOSUR, the presidents of the respective National Eligibility Commissions helped advance common asylum policies and develop improved protection standards. The Cartagena +30 process also galvanized the support of civil society, with more than 150 organizations participating in consultative meetings with the Norwegian Refugee Council's support.

NORTH AMERICA
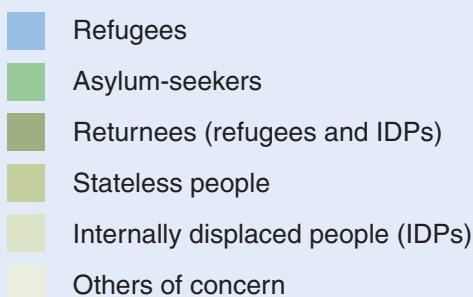AND THE CARIBBEAN

LATIN AMERICA

| CONSTRAINTS |

In 2014, the main challenges for asylum-seekers were: restricted access to asylum, which included pre-admissibility procedures and increasing risk of *refoulement*; the lack of adequate screening and identification mechanisms in mixed flows, especially for protection at sea in the Caribbean; and low recognition rates.

Immigration officials in the region increasingly resorted to administrative detention when apprehending undocumented migrants and others seeking protection. UNHCR faced difficulties in preventing the detention of asylum-seekers, owing to limited resources and administrative barriers. Also, access to detention facilities to monitor the effective screening of people in need of international protection sometimes proved difficult.
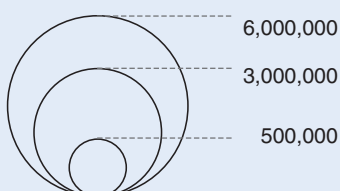
Solutions for stateless people in the Dominican Republic were limited. UNHCR offered to support the authorities in setting up measures to restore their nationality through a special naturalization procedure.

Refugees

Asylum-seekers

Returnees (refugees and IDPs)

Stateless people

Internally displaced people (IDPs)

Others of concern

Population size

6,000,000

3,000,000

500,000

| ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPACT |

UNHCR's key achievement in the Americas was the successful planning and facilitation of the Cartagena +30 process, which led to the adoption of the Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action. Cartagena +30 became an internationally-recognized humanitarian brand, which reflected the commitment of Latin American and Caribbean States to expand their strong asylum tradition, set high protection standards and find sustainable solutions.

◉ Brazil Plan of Action

The Brazil Plan of Action features innovative programmes, as described below:

- Improved refugee status determination procedures and management on all matters relating to the right to seek and be granted asylum through the Quality Assurance Initiative. This Initiative aims to manage increasing numbers of asylum claims in an efficient way.
- The Borders of Solidarity and Safety programme that addresses the protection needs of people who reside and transit in, or return to, border areas as part of mixed migratory movements. There was recognition that border areas are complex and need to be preserved as spaces of safety and protection for all.
- Voluntary repatriation, local integration and solidarity resettlement programmes that reflect the region's commitment towards durable solutions. A fourth programme on labour mobility was underway to offer refugees the possibility of benefitting from existing migration options under regional integration frameworks, particularly within MERCOSUR.
- Three programmes on prevention, dignified and safe transit, as well as on the establishment of a Human Rights Observatory on Displacement, that respond to the needs of people fleeing violence, persecution and transnational organized crime.
- A programme on eradicating statelessness in the next decade. Latin America and the Caribbean became the first region in the world to respond UNHCR's global campaign to end statelessness.

◉ Regional Consultative Mechanism

Caribbean States and Territories agreed to strengthen regional dialogue on protection and manage mixed migratory flows more efficiently through the Regional Consultative Mechanism. This mechanism aims to support the progressive establishment of asylum systems and procedures that identify and assist different groups at risk; guarantee access to refugee status determination procedures; and provide alternatives to detention for asylum-seekers and children. Trinidad and Tobago has set an example in 2014 by adopting a new refugee policy, including a three-year phased strategy to assume full responsibility for refugee status determination and protection.

◉ Other Protection Initiatives

UNHCR supported access to remunerated work for Colombian refugees through existing labour mobility schemes within MERCOSUR. Schemes with built-in protection safeguards helped facilitate the relocation of Colombian refugees who have settled in other South American countries.

In the Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA), UNHCR responded to the forced displacement crisis by launching a regional initiative to bolster border monitoring and expand protection networks in Guatemala, Honduras and southern Mexico. The Office sought alternatives to detention as well as ways to improve the reception conditions and shelter for children with protection concerns in Guatemala and Mexico. With the support of the Inter-Institutional Commission for the Protection of Displaced Persons by Violence in Honduras, protection mechanisms for monitoring the situation of returnee children and others with protection needs at the national level were reinforced.

The refugee reform in Canada entered its second year in 2014. UNHCR proposed observing new asylum processes, while providing technical advice on procedures in the lead up to a review of the reform planned by Canadian authorities in 2015.

In Colombia, the operational focus was on enabling the transition from immediate

assistance to longer-term solutions for displaced populations through the Transition Solutions Initiative, a joint project between UNHCR and UNDP. The Initiative has considerable potential to further assist victims of forced displacement in regaining their rights as citizens.

In Costa Rica, Colombian refugees were integrated locally or appeared to be less dependent on aid. With the support of UNHCR's partner *Asociación de Consultores y Asesores Internacionales* in San José, the Office implemented the "graduation approach", which seeks to "graduate" people out of poverty in rural or urban areas through a sequenced combination of livelihoods provisioning, capacity building and microfinance.

In Ecuador, the Comprehensive Solutions Initiative, which aims to support the Government's efforts to find durable solutions, was carried out to provide better livelihood and resettlement opportunities for refugees. The prospect of labour mobility with protection safeguards was also explored.

In Mexico, the Human Security Trust Fund project improved the capacity of Government authorities and civil society at the southern border with Guatemala to identify people with protection needs and expand access to asylum procedures. The number of people with these needs referred for asylum increased, and this subsequently helped promote dialogue on protection matters among the National Eligibility Commission, the National Migration Institute, civil society and UNHCR. To respond to the rising number of people displaced in the NTCA, the protection network strengthened child protection, most notably by providing shelter for minors.

In 2014, the Government of Panama issued permanent residence documents to approximately 400 Colombians, who had previously benefitted from temporary protection status in the Darién province of the country for the past 15 years.

To help respond to the influx of new arrivals, mainly unaccompanied children from Central America to the United States, UNHCR supported improved access to asylum procedures and legal representation. The Office further advocated for alternatives to detention and alternative refugee status determination mechanisms. In March 2014, a report entitled *Children on the Run*, which reflected the findings of research undertaken at the US southern border, was launched. The report concluded that the majority of unaccompanied children apprehended were found to be in need of international protection.

In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, a joint work plan enabled authorities to register many asylum-seekers, allowing them to access asylum procedures and benefit from a rising recognition rate of nearly 20 per cent. UNHCR also signed a strategic livelihood project partnership with FUNDAMUSICAL (*Sistema Nacional de Orquestas Juveniles e Infantiles de Venezuela*), which contributed to the local integration of young refugee children by offering regular music lessons.
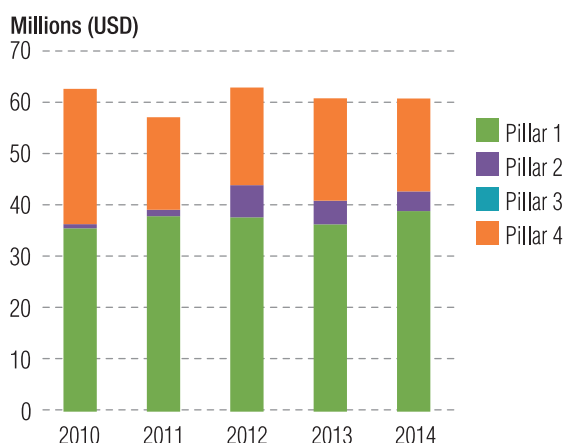
More than 56,000 refugees were resettled in Canada and the United States. Solidarity resettlement countries, such as Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay, offered to resettle nearly 120 refugees. In 2014, approximately 10 per cent of all resettled Syrians were living in the Americas, mainly in Brazil, Canada, Uruguay and the United States. ■

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

The region's 2014 budget, which was approved by the Executive Committee in 2013, amounted to USD 110.4 million. As the budget did not increase significantly in the course of the year, a reprioritization exercise was conducted to address displacement in Central America; strengthen programmes for child protection in Mexico and protection monitoring in Honduras; and promote durable solutions in Colombia, Costa Rica and Ecuador. Total expenditure in 2014 stood at USD 61.1 million.

Lack of funding prevented a stronger protection response to the needs of people in mixed migratory movements in the Caribbean, where States and Territories struggle to manage increasing numbers of boat arrivals.

EXPENDITURE IN THE AMERICAS | 2010-2014

Millions (USD)

Legend:
- Pillar 1
- Pillar 2
- Pillar 3
- Pillar 4

BUDGET AND EXPENDITURE IN THE AMERICAS | USD

Operation		Pillar 1 Refugee programme	Pillar 2 Stateless programme	Pillar 3 Reintegration projects	Pillar 4 IDP projects	Total
NORTH AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN						
Canada	Budget	1,990,548	51,512	0	0	2,042,060
	Expenditure	1,507,045	29,898	0	0	1,536,943
United States of America Regional Office[1]	Budget	7,707,214	7,397,189	0	3,270,295	18,374,698
	Expenditure	5,430,342	3,534,061	0	620,575	9,584,978
Subtotal	**Budget**	**9,697,762**	**7,448,701**	**0**	**3,270,295**	**20,416,758**
	Expenditure	**6,937,387**	**3,563,959**	**0**	**620,575**	**11,121,921**
LATIN AMERICA						
Argentina Regional Office[2]	Budget	4,319,637	62,415	0	0	4,382,052
	Expenditure	3,576,149	62,382	0	0	3,638,531
Brazil	Budget	8,080,736	115,643	0	0	8,196,379
	Expenditure	2,699,227	34,963	0	0	2,734,190
Colombia	Budget	1,362,555	0	0	29,177,542	30,540,097
	Expenditure	712,503	0	0	17,513,854	18,226,357
Costa Rica	Budget	2,882,871	0	0	0	2,882,871
	Expenditure	1,965,996	0	0	0	1,965,996
Ecuador	Budget	20,979,986	0	0	0	20,979,986
	Expenditure	12,058,908	0	0	0	12,058,908
Mexico	Budget	2,990,463	0	0	0	2,990,463
	Expenditure	1,994,832	0	0	0	1,994,832
Panama Regional Office[3]	Budget	8,100,632	324,599	0	0	8,425,231
	Expenditure	4,282,183	168,368	0	0	4,450,551
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Budget	10,936,633	0	0	0	10,936,633
	Expenditure	4,091,547	0	0	0	4,091,547
Regional activities[4]	Budget	885,260	0	0	0	885,260
	Expenditure	821,933	0	0	0	821,933
Subtotal	**Budget**	**60,538,773**	**502,657**	**0**	**29,177,542**	**90,218,972**
	Expenditure	**32,203,278**	**265,713**	**0**	**17,513,854**	**49,982,845**
Total Americas	**Budget**	70,236,535	7,951,358	0	32,447,837	**110,635,730**
	Expenditure	39,140,665	3,829,672	0	18,134,429	**61,104,766**

[1] Includes Haiti, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands, 12 independent Caribbean States, three other CARICOM States, and British and Dutch overseas territories in coordination with the Europe Bureau
[2] Includes activities in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay
[3] Includes the Regional Legal Unit in Costa Rica
[4] Regional activities cover the entire Americas Region

VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE AMERICAS | USD

Donor	Pillar 1 Refugee programme	Pillar 2 Stateless programme	PIllar 4 IDP projects	All pillars	Total
Argentina				126,000	126,000
Brazil	429,611				429,611
Canada			2,921,130	2,244,165	5,165,295
Central Emergency Response Fund			435,001		435,001
Denmark	238,394				238,394
European Union	4,487,690		335,121		4,822,810
Norway			990,099		990,099
Private donors in Italy	58,814			31,083	89,897
Private donors in Spain	131,153		18,717		149,870
Republic of Korea			300,000		300,000
Spain			543,478		543,478
Sweden				690,512	690,512
Switzerland			873,960		873,960
United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS	120,000		99,812		219,812
United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security	265,353	283,550			548,903
United States of America	775,000			18,600,000	19,375,000
Total	6,506,014	283,550	6,517,317	21,691,761	**34,998,641**

Note: Includes indirect support costs that are recovered from contributions to Pillars 3 and 4, supplementary budgets and the "New or additional activities – mandate-related" (NAM) Reserve